

The Rufford Small Grants Foundation

Final Report

Congratulations on the completion of your project that was supported by The Rufford Small Grants Foundation.

We ask all grant recipients to complete a Final Report Form that helps us to gauge the success of our grant giving. We understand that projects often do not follow the predicted course but knowledge of your experiences is valuable to us and others who may be undertaking similar work. Please be as honest as you can in answering the questions – remember that negative experiences are just as valuable as positive ones if they help others to learn from them.

Please complete the form in English and be as clear and concise as you can. We will ask for further information if required. If you have any other materials produced by the project, particularly a few relevant photographs please send these to us separately.

Please submit your final report to jane@rufford.org.

Thank you for your help.

Josh Cole

Grants Director

Grant Recipient Details

Your name	George Gorgadze
Project title	Supporting of Eurasian Otter Conservation in Georgia
RSG reference	61.02.10
Reporting period	July 2010 – October 2011
Amount of grant	£5990
Your email address	giorgi.gorgadze@nacres.org
Date of this report	14.11.2011

1. Please indicate the level of achievement of the project's original objectives and include any relevant comments on factors affecting this.

Objective	Not achieved	Partially achieved	Fully achieved	Comments
1. Develop an otter monitoring programme for Georgia and pilot it in Vashlovani protected areas			√	Guidelines for Eurasian otter monitoring was developed and tested in Vashlovani Protected areas. Field guide for rangers was also provided combined with training course. Both documents could be used in all protected areas of Georgia for Eurasian otter monitoring.
2. Identify otter den and resting sites on river Alazani and mitigate tourism as a threat for otter population		√		An otter survey was undertaken using standard otter survey method in 2010-2011. Otter den and resting sites on river Alazani were identified. GIS data base and thematic maps were produced. Only the small portion of river Alazani, about 3 km named Mijnis Kure was designated for sport fishing.
3. Implement public awareness activities to reduce human-otter conflict			√	A series of meetings were undertaken with local stakeholders. Calendars and leaflets on otter ecology and conservation were shared with them as well as with local school children. Recommendations and mitigation measures to reduce human-otter conflict were disseminated among fish farm owners.

2. Please explain any unforeseen difficulties that arose during the project and how these were tackled.

We didn't encounter any serious problem during the implementation of the project.

3. Briefly describe the three most important outcomes of your project.

3.1. Elaborating of guidelines for monitoring

A protocol was designed to provide the practical information needed to undertaken the monitoring of Eurasian otter in protected areas. Methods, described in this document allow the implementers to assess the status of the species as well as the conditions of its habitat. The document describes the methods how to: (a) monitor otter distribution within the protected areas by searching for signs of their presence and (b) detect changes in the habitat which might affect otters.

Existing methods for detecting, monitoring and counting otters were briefly reviewed. Field techniques like camera trapping, track identification, scat analyses, etc. are described in detail and discussed to help staff of protected areas to implement monitoring with existing equipment and human resources.

The monitoring of Eurasian otter has started in Vashlovani protected areas in 2011. If the government will make the decision to start otter monitoring in other protected areas of Georgia, these guidelines could be used everywhere. When more resources for biodiversity monitoring will be available and the local capacity will improve, the scope of the monitoring programme should expand accordingly and cover more territories outside the protected areas.

3.2. Support to mitigate human-otter conflict

Building of artificial fish farms became very popular during the recent years in Georgia. Fish farmers see otters as their competitors, resulting in their persecution at every possible opportunity. They illegally trap otters using leg-hold traps set around rivers, streams and especially near fishponds.

During the previous project, a guide including package of recommendations and prevention measures for reducing otter-human conflict were elaborated. Now a certain amount of fish farms were chosen and specific public awareness activities were undertaken. A field survey team was established, which included students, fish farm owners who already had solved the problem and local young stakeholders. During the meetings organised with fish farm owners, we have presented a package of recommendations and mitigations measures to reduce human-otter conflict. We have presented current situation on other fish farms, where the conflict was already reduced. The fish farm owners have discussed with each other the root causes of their problems, talked how to avoid otter presence near ponds (electric fencing, dogs, etc); we provided some background information on the problem, shared experience of other countries; also the data on otter feeding behaviour obtained during previous project were shared among stakeholders.

We see the positive trend among fish farm owners, which are interested in ecological based otter control techniques that can provide permanent solution to otter-human conflict.

3.3. Reduce otter disturbance

At the beginning of the project an otter survey was undertaken using standard otter survey method. Otter den and resting sites on river Alazani were identified and mapped. Digital photo cameras were purchased and installed in Vashlovani National Park.

Our previous project found that sport fishing could be serious problem for otters in Vashlovani National Park as the inflow of a large number of fishermen can destroy otter habitat. Camera traps were installed in such problematic places. GIS data base and thematic maps were produced.

The administration of Vashlovani protected Areas made the decision to regulate visitor numbers, which could visit the riparian forest habitat along river Alazani. The small portion of river Alazani, about 3 km named Mijnis Kure was designated for sport fishing. There are no otter den sites and fishing season is only during the spring. However, sport fishing in Vashlovani protected area is now regulated and disturbance has been reduced.

4. Briefly describe the involvement of local communities and how they have benefitted from the project.

A field survey team was established, which included students and local young stakeholders. They have participated in data collecting and evaluated the easy and cheap techniques of otter control, which were elaborated during the project. More than 10 rangers of Vashlovani Protected Areas were involved in the field survey team. They received a series of trainings and helped us during data collecting.

Local stakeholders could themselves install camera traps, find places where otter feed and identify fish species which were eaten. Regular visits to fish farms, showing them images taken by scouting cameras, involving them into otter fieldworks step by step changed their negative attitudes toward wildlife and especially wild carnivores. The important thing was that most of our team members were locals which created more understanding between sides.

Many of fish farm owners with our help has purchased digital camera traps, which now are used to control main gates of the farms. Camera traps are also installed on island within fish ponds, which are often occupied by otter and other animals.

At the end of the project most of fish owners could identify by tracks which animal has taken fish from their farms. In study area racoon is very common, which feed most time at night in shallow ponds and early farmers thought that all damage were caused by otters. Our studies also revealed that otters cause only insignificant damage to the commercial fish farm and attitudes toward the otter have dramatically changed.

5. Are there any plans to continue this work?

We plan to undertake national wide otter survey to assess current status and population trend in Georgia. We think that in otter survey many stakeholders will be participate (students, fish farm owners, rangers and etc). During the national wide otter survey additional data on fish farms from different regions will be gathered. GIS Database of existing fish farms will be elaborated, including data on quantity and species composition.

Our otter research and conservation team in close cooperation with local stakeholders will continue otter population monitoring in the Alazani flood plains. We intend to capture otters for radio tracking and study current situation near fish ponds.

6. How do you plan to share the results of your work with others?

A package of recommendations and prevention measures for reducing otter-human conflict was distributed among fish farms and local authorities. Results obtained from the fieldwork were shared with local stakeholders, fish farm owners and non-governmental organizations. The project results will be placed in NACRES annual report.

A result of our work was also shared during XI International Otter Colloquium – Otters in a Warming World, held in Pavia, Italy, from the 30th August to the 4th of September 2011.

7. Timescale: Over what period was the RSG used? How does this compare to the anticipated or actual length of the project?

Grant provided by The Rufford Small Grants Foundation was used in period from July 2010 till the end of October 2011. All activities have been implemented in accordance with the original work plan.

8. Budget: Please provide a breakdown of budgeted versus actual expenditure and the reasons for any differences. All figures should be in £ sterling, indicating the local exchange rate used.

Item	Budgeted Amount	Actual Amount	Difference	Comments
Per Diem/Lodging	£3000	£3270	- £270	More people were involved in the fieldwork as it was planned and difference was added from Calendar and Photo trap budget lines
Photo trap	£1890	£1650	+£240	Difference was shifted to the Per Diem/Lodging budget line
Calendar	£500	£470	+£30	Difference was shifted to the Per Diem/Lodging budget line
Seminars and meetings	£600	£600	£0	
TOTAL	£ 5990	£ 5990		

9. Looking ahead, what do you feel are the important next steps?

Carrying out monitoring of endangered species is obligated by Georgian law and responsibility for biodiversity monitoring is distributed among governmental agencies. A protocol which was elaborated in scope of this project provides the practical information needed to undertake the monitoring of Eurasian otter in protected areas. In close future wide monitoring programme should be implemented with cooperation among governmental agencies and non-governmental organisation, which could provide a training course combined with field sessions to the rangers of the national parks.

National wide otter survey should be undertaken to assess current status and population trend in Georgia. The last survey was made more than 5 years ago. We think that otter habitat was seriously fragmented during the last years. According to the data obtained during the national wide survey, the status of Eurasian otter more precisely should be addressed in the Red List of Georgia.

The next important step to solve otter-human conflict should be implementing of prevention measures to reduce otter-human conflict. I believe that in close cooperation with local stakeholders and involving as much as possible fish farm owners into the process the current conflict could be managed in proper way.

10. Did you use the RSGF logo in any materials produced in relation to this project? Did the RSGF receive any publicity during the course of your work?

RSGF logo was used in calendar on otter and all conditions were agreed with RSGF.